

Shoshone National Forest Travel Planning

Nick Dobric Comments on May 2016 and Nov 2017 Scoping Documents

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Please accept these comments regarding the Shoshone's Proposed Action for Travel Planning. I'm a Dubois resident that enjoys numerous outdoor activities on the Shoshone National Forest across all districts. My comments are developed from the personal experiences I've had regarding motorized abuse while primarily elk and antler hunting.

On the surface, the Proposed Action seems reasonable with no drastic changes. However, the main problem with the proposed action is the lack of any meaningful measures or incentives to address motorized compliance. I appreciate the US Forest Service recognizes the Shoshone as a backcountry forest, however without offering meaningful measures to rein in motorized abuse, our backcountry forest is losing its character with every new illegal route.

I recommend that the agency identify and close all unauthorized motorized routes before permitting any additional motorized routes. The Forest should not be expanding the motorized route system until they are able to get control over the current system. Motorized abuse is a recurring theme over the past years at the WGFHD hunt meetings and this is the best opportunity to rein in this problem. The proposed action should include language that addresses this with a process for implementing, including timeline, budget, and benchmarks that need to be reached. New routes will only add to the problem when they go past open areas that don't have any barriers.

The document cites the Forest Plan in regards to motorized loops yet fails to identify other relevant and important components to the plan specifically:

- *Resource impacts from use of unauthorized motorized routes are eliminated, along with the unauthorized route. (RDTR-GOAL-09)*
- *Unauthorized routes should be closed and rehabilitated as soon as practicable. (RDTR-GUIDE-04)*

There are many illegal routes across the Forest without signage or to identify the route as illegal to prevent further abuse from occurring. I appreciate the Forest Service's effort over the past few seasons, and I understand it has its challenges; but there are many routes that need to be addressed. Just recently I was on 505.1D down to the Wiggins Fork and the route split and it was unclear which route was the legal one because there was no signage.

I provided a proposal sent 10/23/2016 with similar concerns and providing specific examples of unsigned routes. I received no follow-up from that proposal and it is not recognized anywhere in the Proposed Action.

The concept that adding loops will somehow help compliance is unfounded and it's disturbing to hear the Forest claim when there is no evidence and the current situation shows otherwise. Adding loops because there is a desire from the motorized community is fine, but this appears to be coming from other districts, not ours. The Wind River District currently has 162 miles of loops, way more than any other district, and the proposed action would add another 51 miles, again the most of any district. This doesn't add up when I have not heard loops being a huge need for our District. In fact, I recently traveled on the Charlie Creek loop in the middle of summer and it appeared the route received little traffic. The larger need is compliance, something the Proposed Action seems to be missing the boat on.

Separating compliance from the route additions in the proposed action takes the best tool off the table. If compliance is not tied to new routes, there is no incentive from the motorized community to take it serious. An example would be that a new road/motorized trail would have stipulations placed on it that if abuse occurs, the route will be closed.

Hunters are typically good about reporting poachers because they know that it hurts their own opportunities/wildlife resource. If we want responsible motorized users to not only report abuse, but also have clubs work with the agency to implement education/barriers on the ground, there needs to be incentives.

In regards to the compliance working group, I support working groups helping solve natural resource issues but not when they don't have the adequate authority or power to enforce their recommendations. The Forest needs to address this issue now and not pass responsibly off. The document also cites that "Input from the working group may be carried forward." This doesn't appear the Forest is willing to be serious about addressing the problem.

Comments related to Specific Proposals

WR-11, Bachelor Creek: I oppose this addition as I've used the current trail for non-motorized recreation. It also continues to fragment wildlife habitat and good hunting grounds.

WR-63, Grandy Reservoir: I'm okay with this route if there is no potential for more illegal use to continue past the Reservoir towards Windy Mt that already has lots of illegal abuse.

WR-26, Bear Basin: I oppose converting the road to a motorized trail. I believe increasing timing restrictions will be more effective at improving riparian habitat than changing the type of motorized use. ATVs would just continue to create more braided routes and not resolve the problem.

Motorized closures: I support all the closure proposals as they reduce duplicate and dead-end routes that hold little value.

Seasonal Closures: I support the proposed timing stipulations on proposals across the forest.

Winter Use

- I support the proposed winter motorized use season dates. These dates help minimize impacts to wildlife, eliminate conflict between motorized and non-motorized recreation.
- I support the proposal to prohibit motorized use, with the exception of grooming equipment, on and around the Deception Creek and Pinnacles cross-country ski trails.
- Please include a minimum snow depth restriction of 18 inches to ensure that over-snow vehicle use is only occurring when there's enough snow to protect the underlying vegetation
- I oppose designating the Sublette Pass trail as a winter motorized route. This trail has traditionally been used by, and managed for, skiers.

Thank you for your work managing our public lands.

Sincerely,

Nick Dobric

